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HB 311
House Judiciary Committee
Court Dog and Child Witness Protection
**** SUPPORT ****
February 6, 2020

Maryland Children's Alliance (MCA) supports House Bill 311. This bill allows a child witness to be accompanied by a qualified facility or therapy dog which has completed proper training and has been matched with a certified dog handler. The support of a qualified facility dog or therapy dog lessens the re-traumatic experience a child victim will have during court proceedings.

Maryland Children's Alliance is an accredited State Chapter member of the National Children's Alliance. Our twenty-three (23) member child advocacy centers (CAC) provide victims of child abuse with forensic interviews, medical treatment, family advocacy, trauma based therapeutic services and case management in a child-friendly setting by a team of dedicated professionals. Several child advocacy centers across the State have qualified facility or therapy dogs available to support the child and family through their CAC experiences. The qualified facility or therapy dogs are specially trained, meaning their responses to situations are reliable and predictable. Both the dog and handlers go through rigorous and ongoing training.

Having qualified facility or therapy dogs available to support the child in the courtroom will lessen the trauma of telling the details of their abuse while facing the person who victimized them.

We encourage and support a favorable response for HB311.

Susan B. Hansell
State Chapter Director